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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., tours Window Rock Diabetes Wellness Center at Open House

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – A \$3 million showcase Diabetes Wellness Center celebrated its open house here today.

The new Wellness Center will open its doors in August and will be able to accommodate up to 100 people at a time using state-of-the-art exercise equipment. It has two sauna rooms, a massage room and chiropractic room, as well

Best of all, it will be free to those who use it. All that is required is a health screening, which will be available on-site.

“Good health is everything,” Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., told about 100 people gathered for the open house. “If you’re going to do anything, you need good health.”

He said that all manner of diseases is affecting the Navajo people these days. At one time, because everyone worked and exercised as part of daily life, the people faced less illness related to diet or a lack of exercise. But he said nothing holds people back from re-gaining that kind of health.

“Ours is a running life,” he said. “Wherever I go, I pack my running shoes and running shorts. I walk and jog.”

The President said he also attends a sweat lodge at least twice a month or more. He said he’s eager to try the Wellness Center’s new sauna.



Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., is given a tour of the Diabetes Wellness Center by NDOH Director Anslem Roanhorse and Gloria West, NDOH senior programs and projects supervisor. Arvin Trujillo, director of the Division of Natural Resources, which set aside the land, accompanies them.



President Shirley tells the audience gathered for the opening of the Diabetes Wellness Center that running and exercise is part of Navajo life and teachings, and that obtaining benefits from the center is up to each individual. Also speaking is Robert Nakai, director of the Navajo Special Diabetes Project.

Another important key to health is learning to relax, unwind and rejuvenate, he said. His personal method is through reading and watching movies with his family, he said.

The Wellness Center is a project of the Navajo Special Diabetes Project and was funded with help from the Navajo Area Indian Health Service. It's a 10,000-square-foot facility with Stairmaster machines, 10 stationary bikes, trainer machines, free weights, an aerobics room, a kick boxing room and a stretching bar.

Once open, it will employ seven fulltime staff.

An important component of the Wellness Center is its design to accommodate handicapped and disable users.

"I greatly appreciate that you included machines for the handicapped to use," he told Gloria West, the senior programs and projects supervisor who led him on a tour. "These are our people, too, and they are deserving of the same facilities as everyone else. Here, they have that."

Anslem Roanhorse, Jr, Director of the Navajo Division of Health, said 21,000 – or one in four – Navajos are affected by diabetes. Now, he added, people are being affected by many problems associated with obesity.

Diet is an important aspect to solving these health problems but exercise is a critical component that is equal to and as important to regaining good health.

"We're trying to help people already diagnosed with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes," Mr. Roanhorse said. "We also want to help people who are high-risk."

He said the Health Division also wants to target healthy individuals to keep them healthy.

"We want to encourage you to maintain that healthy lifestyle," he said. "We want to keep you healthy."

Mr. Roanhorse said it's the hope of the division to replicate this center at other location. But he added it's up to individuals to use it to gain the benefit it promises.

"It's really up to you to make a difference," he said. "You need to get up early in the morning."

He said he and other Navajos were taught not to get into the habit of sitting around but to look for something to do, whether it was to work with the family's livestock, chop wood, haul water, or tend a cornfield.



Displays help explain what diabetes is, how to read nutrition charts on food packages and how to prevent heart disease and stay healthy.

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